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**CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE USES PERFORMANCE ART
TO PORTRAY MODERN 'BIRDS AND BEES'**

DAYTON, Ohio — The days of explaining human reproduction as the “the birds and the bees” are long gone.

The terminology is often replaced by terms like sperm donor profiles and in-vitro fertilization.

Controversial new reproductive technologies will be the focus of the Critical Art Ensemble’s performance of *Flesh Machine* at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 21, in the Sears Recital Hall of the Jesse Philips Humanities Building at the University of Dayton. The performance is the second event of the 1998-99 Arts Series. General admission tickets cost \$8 and can be purchased by calling (937) 229-2787.

The Critical Art Ensemble, a collective of five new-genre artists who’ve been together since 1987, will present the nontraditional, multimedia performance. Their goals in the project are to examine “how human flesh is being invaded, commodified and marketed,” according to their description in a Summer 1998 *Art Journal*.

The UD performance will open with “Flesh Frontiers,” a lecture taken from their *Flesh Machine* performance that critically analyzes topics such as genetic screening, cryo-preservation of cells and DNA extraction. Using a CD-ROM the ensemble created to portray a faux biotechnology company called BioCom Inc., the audience will view facts about in-vitro fertilization treatment, learn about new methods for assisted reproduction and see actual egg and sperm donor profiles.

The second part of the UD event will be a more traditional lecture. Ensemble members will discuss their theory of recombinant theater, which they describe as “the place where living theater and cyberspace intersect.”

However, when giving the entire *Flesh Machine* performance, the ensemble invites audience members to take donor screening tests themselves. The top scorers on the “Fitness

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Test" screening are asked to participate in "The Cloning Project," which requires them to give a cell sample for cryo-preservation. Using an on-site lab, the ensemble members flash-freeze the donor cell samples and the performance ends with a "Virtual Termination."

The ensemble's performance is based on their book, *Flesh Machine: Cyborgs, Designer Babies, and New Eugenic Consciousness*, which was published by Autonomedia in early 1998. As part of their research, ensemble members observed genetics and biology labs and even lived with two volunteer donors for two weeks as they went through in-vitro fertilization treatment.

A detailed color-slide description of the *Flesh Machine* project, which has been presented at tech-art festivals around the world, as well as information about the Critical Art Ensemble's other projects, can be found at <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~sbarnes/>.

Working as a group on each project, the ensemble has designed Web pages, staged performances at festivals and for museum installations and also has written books and journal articles.

Although collectives are generally thought of as groups with members who are equals at all times, the Critical Art Ensemble doesn't follow that model. "After consensus is reached on how a project should be produced, the member with the greatest expertise in the area has authority over the final project," according to the *Art Journal* article.

Concerns about health care and technology are a common thread throughout many of the ensemble's projects such as "Addictionmania," "Useless Technology" and "Machineworld."

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To contact members of the Critical Art Ensemble, e-mail Steve Barnes at sbarnes@mail.fsu.edu. For more information, call Denise Shoenberger at (937) 229-2787 or Joel Whitaker at (937) 229-2207.